

**EVALUATING THE CONCEPT OF THE 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK EVALUATION
FOR THE DELTONA FIRE DEPARTMENT**

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that there the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed:_____

Abstract

The problem was that the Deltona Fire Department's evaluation process was ineffective, and in need of revision. The purpose of this applied research project was to evaluate the concept of a 360-degree feedback evaluation and to make a recommendation to the fire chief as to whether it should be implemented as Deltona Fire Department's employee performance evaluation. This was an action based research project. The research questions are as follows:

What are advantages of the 360-degree feedback evaluation?

What are disadvantages of the 360-degree feedback evaluation?

What is the 360-degree feedback evaluation used to accomplish in an organization?

What components make a quality 360-degree feedback evaluation?

The procedures were to conduct a literature review and telephone interviews with fire service leaders and human resource representatives from fortune 500 companies.

The results were that the advantages of the 360-degree feedback evaluation include providing more complete feedback about an employee's performance and their organizational and personal developmental needs. Customer service improves and the organization is assisted in developing goals and plans for future growth. Disadvantages include this evaluation process being more time intensive and administratively complex. Acquired data can be destructive if implemented poorly. This evaluation is used primarily for the positive development and growth of the organization's personnel. Components of a quality evaluation include identifying problems to be solved, analysis of the context and current atmosphere for problem resolution, a commitment of resources, a detailed plan for implementation, development plans for the organization and personnel, as well as training and follow-up.

Two recommendations were formed as a result of this research. The recommendations based on this research were for the Deltona Fire Department not to use the 360-degree feedback evaluation as an annual performance evaluation and to purchase software for this type of evaluation and implement it as an employee development and training tool.

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Introduction

In the past, the fire service has considered itself an industry unique to its own. It has conventionally been an industry that relies heavily on tradition and past experience for procedures and practices. However, in recent years the fire service has started to consider itself a business like many other businesses in the corporate world. As such, management is looking to the corporate world for ideas to improve the way business is conducted. One such idea is the 360-degree feedback evaluation.

The overall goal of the performance evaluation is to improve the performance of an employee year after year. This generally does not happen with the traditional evaluation (Manarr, 1997). More and more employees are expected to work independent from the boss (Mullins, 1995). Traditional evaluations when done poorly can be political, subjective, and simplistic. There is generally no way to know if the employee is good at all aspects of their job or just a good performer when the boss is around (Kirksey, Milliman, Schulz, Wiggins, Zawacki, 1994). The 360-degree feedback evaluation is becoming more and more the norm in top businesses around the world (DeBare, 1997). A recent study found that over 90 percent of fortune 1000 companies were using some form of the 360-degree feedback evaluation (Bohlander, Sherman, Scott, 2001). This is due to the increased use of teams. In such cases, team members often know more about the performance of an employee than the boss (DeBare, 1997). In the case of the fire service, the fire station crew can be considered a cross-functional team made up of firefighters, engineers, and company officers. In this scenario, the company may know more about how their officer routinely performs than the battalion chief that has the responsibility to evaluate using traditional methods.

The problem is that the Deltona Fire Department's evaluation process is ineffective, and in need of revision. The purpose of this applied research project is to evaluate the concept of 360-degree feedback evaluation and to make a recommendation to the fire chief as to whether it should be implemented as the Deltona Fire Department's annual employee performance evaluation process. This is an action based research project. The research questions are as follows:

What are advantages of the 360-degree feedback evaluation?

What are disadvantages of the 360-degree feedback evaluation?

What is the 360-degree feedback evaluation used to accomplish in an organization?

What components make a quality 360-degree feedback evaluation?

Background and Significance

The Deltona Fire Department (DFD) is like most fire departments and conducts performance evaluations on its employees. Annually employees are evaluated by their Battalion Chief with the assistance of the individual employee's company officer. In the past, the DFD has understood the value of updating and revising the employee evaluation instrument. The department revised the employee performance evaluation instrument twice. Each time the instrument was updated, the department's focus had been to improve the evaluation with the overall intent of improving the employee's performance each year. The last time the employee performance evaluation was updated was ten years ago and the emphasis was on simplicity and ease of completion. Little research took place on the effectiveness of the evaluation at improving employee performance. This has become a significant problem to the department as the evaluation instrument has become outdated and ineffective at improving employee performance.

Presently the DFD is in the process of updating the employees' performance evaluation. The fire department's administration in cooperation with the union have appointed members to a Joint Evaluation Committee to evaluate and update, among other things, employee evaluations. This researcher is part of that committee. The current instrument is a simple evaluation where employees are evaluated on 15 different criteria. It also involves a comments section where the supervisor explains the positive aspects of an employee's performance over the last year and the areas the employee needs to improve on. It also allows for employees to make comments as they see fit. However, the evaluation does not require the employee to make any comments or set any goals for the employee to meet. It does not involve evaluation from anyone other than the employee's immediate supervisor.

In the future the DFD will continue an evaluation process. The fire chief understands the value of employee development and sees the annual performance evaluation as a tool to promote positive employee growth. Improving the annual performance evaluation will improve employee performance in every division in the fire department and the fire department as a whole. By improving the public education and the fire inspection divisions will improve the fire prevention service to the community and will stop more fires caused by preventable hazards. This makes the United States Fire Administration's operational objective of reducing the loss of life from fire by 15% and reducing the loss of life of the age groups 14 years and younger and 65 years and older more obtainable. Improving the training and fire suppression divisions will increase the effectiveness and safety of firefighters on the fire ground which will work towards satisfying the United States Fire Administration's operational objective of reducing the loss of lives of firefighters more obtainable (United States Fire Administration, 2000).

This research project becomes significant due to the fact that the annual employee performance evaluation affects all personnel in the department. At best, implementing a poor evaluation system has the potential of not improving employee performance. At worst, reducing the effectiveness of the department's personnel. Implementing a quality evaluation system that will meet the needs of the department will improve the value of the service the organization provides to the citizens of Deltona, and enhance the department's reputation as a high quality service provider. This project is directly related to Unit 7, the *Using Feedback* section of the manual for the National Fire Academy's *Executive Leadership* course. This section of the course detailed the importance of feedback in developing oneself as a person and as a leader. The instruction in this section included a film and a PowerPoint presentation however the student manual only included a personal analysis and improvement plan and not any literature about the section (National Fire Academy, 2003). This project is also directly related to Unit 2, the *Developing Self as a Leader* section of the manual for the National Fire Academy's *Executive Leadership* course that reads "Leaders have the ability to create and articulate a vision that empowers others to transform vision into action, and are social architects who build commitment and coalitions and listen to their constituents (National Fire Academy, 2003, p. SM 4-22)." The 360-degree feedback evaluation is a good way to listen to the leader's constituents as the evaluation can be anonymous and the employee can give their honest feedback without fear of reprisal.

Literature Review

The 360-degree feedback evaluation is a performance evaluation in which people are evaluated and rated from several different directions in the organization. They are rated by many different personnel with whom they have contact including their supervisors, peers, subordinates, and sometimes even their customers (Heathfield, n.d.a). Other names for the 360-degree

feedback evaluation are multi-rater feedback, multi-source feedback, full-circle appraisal, and group performance (Koeblin, 1999).

What are the Advantages of the 360-Degree Feedback Evaluation?

There are many more people in an organization that can assess an employee's performance than just their immediate supervisor (Mullins, 1995). The 360-degree feedback evaluation allows an employee to understand how their performance is viewed from their supervisors, peers, subordinates, and their external customers. It provides more rounded feedback from all levels of the organization. Teams become more efficient as members learn how to work more effectively together. Team members become more accountable to each other and can provide valuable feedback to each other on how they are performing. Over time communication improves as well as team development. Employees feel that feedback from these types of evaluations tend to be more accurate and more validating as it is not just from their supervisor. 360-feedback can provide the employee with more specific information and is more useful in both personal and career development as it gives a clearer understanding of organizational and personal developmental needs. This evaluation reduces the possibility of a supervisor only rating an employee on their latest interactions.

From an organizational prospective, customer service improves as employees learn information about the quality of their services or products from both internal and external customers (Heathfield, n.d.a). This increases the accountability employees have to their customers, as they know the customers will have feedback into their performance evaluation. Employees who previously might have only concentrated on pleasing their boss have incentive to work well with everyone they come in contact with (Kirksey, et al. 1994). It can reduce the possibility of discrimination in the organization due to feedback coming from a diverse group of

people in different job functions. The 360-degree feedback evaluation can provide detailed information about organizational training needs in the area of employee development (Heathfield, n.d.a). It provides a more comprehensive view of employee performance and helps the organization in developing goals and plans for future growth. 360-degree feedback evaluation increases the credibility of the performance appraisal system as employees get feedback from all directions including personnel that work with them routinely and not just from above from one person that may only work with them occasionally (Kirksey, et al.).

What are the Disadvantages of the 360-Degree Feedback Evaluation?

Although there are many advantages to the 360-degree feedback evaluation there are also some disadvantages as well. This evaluation process is more time intensive and is much more administratively complex (Kirksey, et al. 1994). This evaluation requires many raters, unlike the traditional evaluation, and therefore requires more time on the part of the entire organization (Heathfield, n.d.a). The giving and receiving of feedback can be intimidating to some employees and therefore requires significant training of both the persons conducting the rating as well as those receiving the evaluation. This training also adds to the time the organization must invest in order for this system to be a success (Kirksey, et al.). There may also be conflicting opinions from different raters. Although the rating may be conflicting they may be accurate from the standpoint of those rating the individual (Bohlander, Sherman, Scott, 2001). Since this evaluation process should be implemented slowly and with only a segment of the organization in the beginning, it will take commitment on the part of the organization to develop and revise the evaluation instrument until it becomes a quality product for all personnel. There can be a tendency on some employee's part to hunt down those that gave them poor ratings even though the raters are anonymous (Kirksey, et al.). There is no way to hold anonymous raters accountable

when evaluations are completed poorly (Bohlander, Sherman, Scott, 2001). Employees have no way to go back and ask for clarification about particular rating or if comments are unclear from anonymous raters. Raters can band together to give personnel undue high or low ratings. If the evaluation is not designed to support the organizations strategic goals, then it will fail to improve the organization as a whole (Heathfield, n.d.a). If the evaluation process is implemented poorly or the evaluations themselves are completed without care, the process can create widespread resentment and confusion (DeBare, 1997).

What is the 360-Degree Feedback Evaluation Used to Accomplish in an Organization?

The 360-degree feedback evaluation has been used to accomplish several objectives for an organization. They are used to achieve strategic goals and change the culture of an organization by clarifying the behaviors necessary to support these initiatives. They can enhance team efficiency by recognizing gaps in team skills. A 360-degree feedback evaluation is used to create data for companies to analyze to create individual and organizational training and development needs. They are used to change the behavior of the personnel in the organization and provide staff with the information of what they need to do differently to be effective within the company. They will give personnel an idea of the vision, values, and the mission of the company and what behaviors are consistent with organizational needs. They are used as a tool to set goals on a personal and organizational level. They give personnel an idea of how others in the organization perceive their behavior and performance. This type of evaluation process will provide a more accurate feedback of the performance of personnel in the company (Koeblin, 1999). In cases where external customers are involved, they give the individual and the organization an idea of how customer service is perceived. They can be used to create better customer-oriented goals (Kirksey, et al. 1994). The 360-degree feedback evaluation helps the

employee and the organization understand their strengths and weakness and gives insights of the professional development that is needed to improve (Heathfield, n.d.a). Over time it will boost the productivity of both the employees and the organization (DeBare, 1997).

What Components Make a Quality 360-Degree Feedback Evaluation?

The 360-degree feedback evaluation involves a process of identifying problems to be solved, an analysis of the context and current atmosphere for problem resolution, and a commitment of resources. It further involves a detailed plan for implementation, development plans for the organization and personnel, as well as training and follow-up.

An implementation plan must be developed before the 360-degree feedback evaluation can be introduced to the personnel within the company. A team of employees should be selected from all levels of the organization to implement and facilitate the process. In order for 360-degree feedback to be introduced to a company successfully, a lot of work must be done to ready the company for the new system. This readiness work can be just as significant to the growth of the organization as the 360-degree feedback evaluation itself. The implementation plan should include identification of the organizations strategic goals and values, and the problems that are keeping the company from reaching these goals and values effectively. It must link ways of accomplishing these goals and values to the 360-degree feedback evaluation instrument.

Another problem this plan must identify is who will be involved in the process to begin with.

Most organizations do not involve all personnel at the inception of the system. Small groups are often chosen in order to practice the implementation and to learn how to get the most value from the system. Often top-level managers are chosen as the first group to participate in the process.

When top-level managers participate in the process it demonstrates the commitment the organization has for the system. Employees are often more willing to be receptive to the system

when they see top-management's willingness to open up to feedback from the organization. The implementation plan also should analyze the context and current atmosphere for problem resolution, as this will determine if the evaluation's raters should be anonymous or identified. It should also identify what resources will be needed both monetarily and in time to the organization. Often outside expertise will be needed to assess the organizations readiness and to help develop and implement this plan. Adequate resources must be devoted for analysis, planning, training, follow-up, and outside expertise if the process is to be a success.

The creation of development plans is another key component of a quality 360-degree feedback evaluation process. Development plans should be developed for both the employee and the organization. A development plan should encompass a statement of purpose, description of skill gaps and development needs, a plan to meet those needs, identification of resources, and a timeframe for completion. The plan should identify if the employees will be required to share some or all of their feedback with their manager and then work on the plan together, or if employee will be the only recipient of the feedback and therefore accountable for the creation of their own plan.

Training is another key component of the 360-degree feedback evaluation. All personnel involved in the process, from supervisors to participants, should be educated from the beginning regarding the purpose and goals of the evaluation system. Supervisors who are involved in teaching, coaching, mentoring, or helping their employees use the feedback they receive, will need to be trained to accomplish these tasks (Koeblin, 1999). Personnel that will be rating individuals need to be trained on how to give constructive feedback in a productive and non-critical manner. Personnel receiving the feedback need training on how to receive this

information and then put it to constructive use. Communication must be emphasized during training as well as all other aspects of the process. (Kirksey, et al. 1994).

Following up with the employee is another key component to the 360-degree feedback evaluation. In organizations that fail to deliver follow-up training and developmental assistance will find that employees are reluctant to go through the process again. Employees will also expect future feedback on improvement. Employees will need clarification of what is expected of them and ongoing support if the feedback they receive is going to lead to an expected action or change. The effectiveness of the process is directly linked to integrity of the system, and follow-up is essential to maintaining that integrity (Koeblin, 1999).

Raters must also be chosen to complete the evaluations. Potential raters should be those who have significant interaction with the person receiving the rating. Raters can be chosen by the personnel being rated and their supervisor, by a computer generated system, or a combination of both. Generally five to 10 raters are chosen, as less than five unnecessarily limits the perspective of an employee, and more than 10 typically makes the appraisal system too complex. Raters can be either anonymous or identified, or can be given the choice to be identified if they wish. Anonymous raters are chosen by most organizations, at least until sufficient understanding, maturity and trust is achieved within the organization. Anonymous raters can rate an employee honestly and without the fear of retaliation, especially when rating a supervisor. The problem with anonymous raters is that personnel will sometimes confront those they think may have given them a poor rating. If raters are identified, then raters can be asked to clarify their ratings or comments when they are unclear. There must also be a clear definition of who are supervisors, peers, and subordinates (Kirksey, et al. 1994).

An important consideration is how many items to include in the evaluation instrument. More questions provide more validity however require more time to complete and analyze. This is an important consideration when anywhere from five to 10 employees are involved in completing the evaluation. Organizations must try to develop a balance, with the evaluation instrument being complex enough to be meaningful, but simple enough to be completed easily and timely (Kirksey, et al. 1994). Each question should allow for examples and comments about the question. This allows for better understanding of the ratings that were given (Heathfield, n.d.b).

It is important that the organization create a non-threatening atmosphere by emphasizing that the major purpose of the evaluation is to facilitate the employee's development and performance (Kirksey, et al. 1994). This evaluation is most successful when it is used as a tool that supports and develops personnel to attain the company's goals and values. One of the biggest fears people have is that a group of anonymous people will determine their pay increases and chance for promotion. The evaluation should not be used to determine pay increases and promotions (Heathfield, n.d.b). The temptation to inflate ratings is far greater in companies that use the evaluation for promotions and pay increases (DeBare, 1997).

A summary of all of the interviews as a part of this research concluded that there is a wide range of experience with using the 360-degree feedback evaluation. Some had used the evaluation for 12 years while another had only used it for one year. Most had good success with the evaluation however, one was a complete failure with the multi-rater concept. Most of those interviewed felt that the advantages of the evaluation were that it gave broader and more honest feedback to the employee. Battalion Chief Strahan felt that you would often receive feedback, both good and bad, that people would not say to you directly. Disadvantages were that the

evaluation is more time intensive and in large organizations can be costly. It also can be destructive to an organization if implemented poorly. In all cases the evaluation was used to develop personnel in a positive manner in an organization. It is also used to show an employee their strengths and weaknesses and to provide feedback to create a positive change in behavior. Components that make a quality 360-degree feedback evaluation include anonymous raters that are protected from retaliation and assessments that are not tied to pay or promotion. They need to be as short as practical so people are not over burdened by the complexity of the evaluation. They should include a comment section for each of the different areas that are rated. The evaluation should be tied to your organizations goals and realistically measure the employee's performance as related to those goals. None of the evaluations, from the personnel interviewed, were tied to pay increases or promotion. In one case it could be voluntarily added to an application for promotion. About half of those interviewed implemented the system in small groups and the others implemented it company wide. All of the evaluations were customized to the organizations involved. One of the evaluations was purchased as a generic system that was customized by the organization after it was received. In all cases the data was tabulated either by outside companies or by the evaluation software itself.

The telephone interviews were conducted with Captain Michael Botto, Fire Marshal with the Oakdale City Fire Department, Oakdale, California; Battalion Chief Wade Strahan of the Anchorage Fire Department, Anchorage, Alaska; Human Resource Representative Leann Cornell of Cisco Systems, San Jose, California; Human Resource Representative Mickiy Anderson of Coca-Cola Enterprises, Atlanta, Georgia; and Human Resource Specialist Laura Skinner of Continental Airlines, Houston, Texas.

These personnel were selected for interview due to their knowledge, and experience with using the 360-degree feedback evaluation within their organization. The intent was to select personnel from both the fire service and from the field of human resources in fortune 500 companies. Fire service personnel would be able to provide perspective from a fire service point of view, and representatives from fortune 500 companies would give a perspective from the successful part of the corporate world. A telephone interview was conducted, rather than a survey or other means of gathering information, to ensure that the information was obtained directly from personnel that have experience with working with the 360-degree feedback evaluation in leadership roles and not passed off to an assistant to complete. These interviews were important to the project to gain personal insight into the concept of the 360-degree feedback evaluation that would not be achieved through a literature review alone. These interviews influenced this applied research project by providing information to help answer the research questions and in developing a recommendation about using the 360-degree feedback evaluation as an annual performance evaluation in the DFD.

The data gathered from the literature review and the interviews influenced this project by providing valuable information that answered the research questions and achieved the purpose of evaluating the concept of using the 360-degree feedback evaluation and making a recommendation to the fire chief as to whether it should be implemented as an annual performance evaluation for the DFD. The information further demonstrated the need to use this type of evaluation process as an employee development tool and not as an annual performance evaluation. As a result of this research, a memo was drafted to the DFD fire chief with the above recommendations and is included in Appendix B.

Procedures

This project follows the guidelines for publication as set forth in the Executive Fire Officer Program Operational Policies and Procedures Applied Research Guidelines and the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association Fifth Edition. A two-step procedure was used to evaluate the concept of the 360-degree feedback evaluation for the DFD. The applied research project was action based using a literature review and telephone interviews to answer the following research questions:

1. What are advantages of the 360-degree feedback evaluation?
2. What are disadvantages of the 360-degree feedback evaluation?
3. What is the 360-degree feedback evaluation used to accomplish in an organization?
4. What components make a quality 360-degree feedback evaluation?

The first step was to select literature relevant to the 360-degree feedback evaluation for review. This researcher felt this would be a necessary step in order to gain pertinent information to answer the research questions. A review of two textbooks was conducted to obtain information. These two books were the *Managing Human Resources 12 Edition* and *Total Quality Management, Organization, and Strategy Second Edition*.

Also a list of journals based on their relevance to the fire service were reviewed. The list of journals included:

Firehouse

Fire Chief

Fire Engineering

Fire Command

Fire-Rescue Magazine

Health & Safety

9-1-1 Public Education

Journal of the National Association for Search and Rescue

A list of websites that contained potential information related to the research questions were examined. These sites were as follows:

National Fire Academy

Firehouse

Fire Engineering

United States Fire Administration

About Human Resources

The American Association of School Administrators

Workforce Management

San Francisco Chronicle

The Manager

Work 911

Finally, the Volusia County Public Library's information database system called Infotrac was utilized.

The second step was to conduct telephone interviews. Fire department leaders as well as human resource representatives from fortune 500 companies were interviewed from across the nation that have had experience with using the 360-degree feedback evaluation. The following personnel were interviewed:

Captain Michael Botto, Fire Marshal with the Oakdale City Fire Department, Oakdale, California;

Battalion Chief Wade Strahan of the Anchorage Fire Department, Anchorage, Alaska;
Human Resource Representative Leann Cornell of Cisco Systems, San Jose, California;
Human Resource Representative Mickiy Anderson of Coca-Cola Enterprises, Atlanta,
Georgia and;

Human Resource Specialist Laura Skinner of Continental Airlines, Houston, Texas.

The purpose of these interviews was to gain information to answer the research questions and to achieve the purpose of evaluating the concept of the 360-degree feedback evaluation and to make a recommendation to the fire chief as to whether it should be implemented as the annual performance evaluation for the DFD. Each interview averaged approximately 20 minutes in duration. All of the interviews were conducted on January 19, 2005 except with Human Resource Specialist Laura Skinner of Continental Airlines, which was conducted on January 21, 2005. The questions for these interviews are provided as appendix A.

Limitations

The scope of the research was the study of the concept of the 360-degree feedback evaluation, and to determine if it would be effective as an annual performance evaluation for the DFD. The research was limited to the perspective and knowledge of personnel in the fire service and those in the human resource field as it pertains to 360-degree feedback evaluations. It was also limited to the education, training, and experience of the personnel interviewed and those that wrote or contributed information in the books, trade journals, web sites, and databases reviewed. The research was additionally limited by the lack of information in fire service literature pertaining to this type of evaluation process. When conducting the research for this project, it was found that there is little information or literature written on behalf of the fire service on this topic. Of all the fire service trade journals reviewed there was not any information written on

this subject and a review of the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center only produced five applied research projects on this subject.

Definition of Terms

360-degree feedback evaluation - a performance evaluation by their supervisors, peers, subordinates, and sometimes even their customers. Other names for the 360-degree feedback evaluation are multi-rater feedback, multi-source feedback, full-circle appraisal, and group performance.

Results

A literature review was conducted to obtain information for this applied research project. The results of the literature review are that there are many advantages to the 360-degree feedback evaluation. The 360-degree feedback evaluation allows employees to understand how supervisors, peers, subordinates, and their external customers view their performance. It provides more rounded feedback from all levels of the organization and teams become more efficient. Team members become more accountable and communication improves as well as team development. Employees feel that feedback from 360-degree feedback evaluations tend to be more accurate, validating, and useful in both personal and career development. They can provide the employee with more specific information and gives a clearer understanding of organizational and personal developmental needs and reduces the possibility of a supervisor only rating an employee on their latest interactions (Heathfield, n.d.a). From an organizational perspective, customer service improves and the accountability employees have to their customers increases. Employees who previously might have only concentrated on pleasing their boss have incentive to work well with everyone they come in contact with (Kirksey, et al. 1994).It can

reduce the possibility of discrimination in the organization and can provide detailed information about organizational training needs in the area of employee development (Heathfield, n.d.a). It provides a more comprehensive view of employee performance and helps the organization in developing goals and plans for future growth. 360-degree feedback evaluation increases the credibility of the performance appraisal system (Kirksey, et al.).

The results of the literature review also revealed that there are some disadvantages to the 360-degree feedback evaluation as well. This evaluation process is more time intensive and administratively complex (Kirksey, et al. 1994). Therefore, it requires more time on the part of the entire organization (Heathfield, n.d.a). The giving and receiving of feedback requires significant training of those persons preparing the rating as well as those receiving the evaluation and this also adds to the time the organization must invest in order for this system to be a success. The evaluation should be implemented slowly and will take commitment on the part of the organization to develop and revise until it becomes a quality product for all personnel. There can be a tendency on some employee's part to hunt down those that gave them poor ratings (Kirksey, et al.). If the evaluation process is implemented poorly or the evaluations themselves are completed without care, the process can create widespread resentment and confusion (DeBare, 1997). If evaluators are anonymous, employees have no way to go back and ask for clarification about particular ratings or comments that are unclear. Raters can band together to give personnel undue high or low ratings and if the evaluation is not designed to support the organizations strategic goals, then the organization will fail to improve (Heathfield, n.d.a).

The results of literature review also revealed the 360-degree feedback evaluation have been used to accomplish several objectives for an organization. They are used to achieve

strategic goals, and to change the culture of an organization. They enhance team efficiency by recognizing gaps in team skills and are used to create data for companies to analyze to create individual and organizational training and development. They are used to change the behavior of the personnel in the organization and provide them with the information necessary to be effective within the company. They will give personnel an idea of the vision, values, and the mission of the company and what behaviors are consistent with organizational needs. They are used as a tool to set goals on a personal and organizational level and give personnel an idea of how others in the organization perceive their behavior and performance (Koeblin, 1999). In cases where external customers are involved, they give the individual and the organization an idea of how customer service is perceived and are used to create better customer-oriented goals (Kirksey, et al. 1994). The 360-degree feedback evaluation helps the employee and the organization understand their strengths and weaknesses and gives insights of the professional development that is needed to improve (Heathfield, n.d.a). Over time they will boost the productivity of employees and organizations (DeBare, 1997).

The results of literature review also revealed that the components necessary to make a quality 360-degree feedback evaluation involves a process of identifying problems to be solved, an analysis of the context and current atmosphere for problem resolution, a commitment of resources, a detailed plan for implementation, development plans for the organization and personnel, as well as training and follow-up. The implementation plan must be developed before the 360-degree feedback evaluation can be introduced to the personnel within the company. A team of employees should be selected from all levels of the organization to implement and facilitate the process and in order for it to be introduced to a company successfully, work must be done to ready the company for the new system. The implementation plan should include

identification of the organizations strategic goals and values, and the problems that are keeping the company from reaching these goals and values. It must link ways of accomplishing identified goals and value to the 360-degree feedback evaluation instrument and identify who will be involved in the implementation process. Small groups are often chosen in order to practice the implementation and to learn how to get the most value from the system. Often top-level managers are chosen as the first group to participate in the process. The implementation plan should also analyze the context and current atmosphere for problem resolution, as this will determine if the evaluation's raters should be anonymous or identified. It should identify what resources will be needed both monetarily and in time to the organization. Often outside expertise will be needed to assess the organizations readiness and to help develop and implement this plan. Adequate resources must be devoted if the process is to be a success.

The creation of development plans is a necessary component of a quality 360-degree feedback evaluation process. Development plans should be developed for both the employee and the organization. A development plan should encompass a statement of purpose, description of skill gaps and development needs, a plan to meet those needs, identification of resources, and a timeframe for completion. The plan should identify if the employee will be required to share some or all of their feedback with their manager. (Koeblin, 1999).

Training is a necessary component of the 360-degree feedback evaluation. All personnel involved in the process, from supervisors to participants, should be educated from the beginning regarding the purpose and goals of the evaluation system. Supervisors who are involved in teaching, coaching, mentoring, or helping their employees use the received feedback will need to be trained to accomplish these tasks (Koeblin, 1999). Personnel that will be rating individuals need to be trained on how to give constructive feedback and personnel receiving the feedback

need training on how to receive this information and then put it to constructive use.

Communication must be emphasized during training as well as all other aspects of the process (Kirksey, et al. 1994).

Following up with the employee is a necessary component to the 360-degree feedback evaluation. Organizations that fail to deliver follow-up training and developmental assistance will find that employees are reluctant to go through the process again. Employees will also expect future feedback on their improvement, will need clarification of what is expected of them, and need ongoing support. The effectiveness of the process is directly linked to the integrity of the system, and follow-up is essential to maintaining that integrity (Koeblin, 1999).

Raters must be chosen to complete the evaluations and should be those who have significant interaction with the person receiving the rating. Raters can be chosen by the personnel being rated and their supervisor, by a computer generated system, or a combination of both. Generally five to 10 raters are chosen, and can be either anonymous or identified, or can be given the choice to be identified if they wish. Anonymous raters are chosen by most organizations, however the problem with anonymous raters is that personnel will sometimes confront those they think may have given them a poor rating. If raters are identified, they can be asked to clarify their ratings or comments when they are unclear. There must also be a clear definition of who are supervisors, peers, and subordinates (Kirksey, et al. 1994).

An important consideration is how many items to include in the evaluation instrument. More questions provide more validity however; organizations must try to develop a balance, with the evaluation instrument being complex enough to be meaningful, but simple enough to be completed easily and timely (Kirksey, et al. 1994). Each question should allow for examples and comments about the question (Heathfield, n.d.b). It is important that the organization create a

non-threatening atmosphere and the evaluation is most successful when it is used as a tool that supports and develops personnel to attain the company's goals and values (Heathfield, n.d.b). The evaluation should not be used to determine pay increases and promotions (Heathfield, n.d.b).

As a part of this research telephone interviews were conducted with Captain Michael Botto, Fire Marshal with the Oakdale City Fire Department, Oakdale, California; Battalion Chief Wade Strahan of the Anchorage Fire Department, Anchorage, Alaska; Human Resource Representative Leann Cornell of Cisco Systems, San Jose, California; Human Resource Representative Mickiy Anderson of Coca-Cola Enterprises, Atlanta, Georgia; and Human Resource Specialist Laura Skinner of Continental Airlines, Houston, Texas.

The results of the interview with Captain Michael Botto, Fire Marshal with the Oakdale City Fire Department revealed that his department implemented the 360-degree feedback evaluation, however after one round of evaluations the process was modified from a multi-rater system to a single rater system. Captain Botto stated that the organization that tabulated the information into feedback for the employees did not provide the feedback in a constructive type manner. The company gave the project to an employee that did not understand the process. The feedback that was supplied was provided in raw form and not in a manner that was constructive and useful. He stated that the advantages of the evaluation was that it provides an accurate perspective of an employees capabilities and contributions to the organization. He stated that when feedback comes from multiple personnel and not just from one supervisor, people tend to believe it more and take a closer look at themselves. He stated the disadvantages occur when the process is not done properly and constructively. In the case of his department, the process became more destructive than helpful. Captain Botto stated that the intent of what the evaluation was to accomplish was to provide more objective and subjective information about the personnel

in the department. It was designed as an awareness tool to promote positive change in the individual employee. He stated that components that make a quality evaluation were questions and ratings that are related to the values and objectives of the department. It should be customized to the department and realistic to the organization. He stated that he did not remember if the evaluation was tied to pay increases and was only tied to promotions if the employee wanted to attach copies of the evaluation to the promotion application. He stated that when the evaluation was implemented it was done department wide. This was done due to the fact that his department is a small department with only 12 personnel at the time. He felt that in large organizations the evaluation should be implemented with a small group of personnel that understood the concept of the process. He advised that the evaluation instrument should be customized to the department and that the evaluation instrument that was customized for his department was still in use. However, he stated that it was not used as a multi-rater evaluation but as a more traditional single rater evaluation done by the employee's supervisor (M. Botto, personal communication, January 19, 2005).

The results of the interview with Battalion Chief Wade Strahan of the Anchorage Fire Department revealed that they have been using the 360-degree feedback evaluation for 10 years. He stated that the advantages of the evaluation are that personnel receive feedback from the people they directly work with, the feedback is honest, and the people will say things both good and bad that they may not say directly to you. The disadvantages are that it can be time consuming, and that with the software their department uses, comments are given exactly as written. The evaluation is used in the Anchorage Fire Department for employee development. Components of a quality evaluation include not tying the evaluation into pay increases or promotions. The evaluation should also be as short as practical as people will not spend the time

to complete a quality evaluation if it is overly time consuming. It also should include comment sections as the real value to the evaluation is in the comments. The evaluation in Anchorage is also voluntary and only done on request. When it was first implemented the evaluation was only given to small groups. Chief Strahan stated that their evaluation was an off the shelf brand of evaluation however, it can be customized by the department. The evaluation software can also create development plans based on the non-customized portions. The software itself tabulates the data and provides a report for the employee (W. Strahan, personal communication, January 19, 2005).

The results of the interview with Human Resource Representative Leann Cornell of Cisco Systems revealed that her company has been using the 360-degree feedback evaluation for about five years. She stated that the advantage of this evaluation is that employees get a clear picture of their performance. The disadvantage of this evaluation is that people that have a grudge with an employee may rate them undeservedly low, however this will be evident with good evaluation systems. The evaluation is used at Cisco Systems to help the employee gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses, and to help them and their team grow in a positive manner. This evaluation is given yearly to mid and top management. She stated that the components that make a quality evaluation are when the employee gets to choose their raters, and the raters are protected from repercussions. At Cisco the employee knows who the raters are but not whose comments are whose, and the employee and their immediate supervisor see the feedback. She stated that their evaluation was not used for pay increases or for promotions. When the evaluation was implemented, it was implemented organization wide. The evaluation was customized for Cisco, and the process is computer generated and the results are tabulated automatically (L. Cornell, personal communication, January 19, 2005).

The results of the interview with Human Resource Representative Mickiy Anderson of Coca-Cola Enterprises revealed that they have been using the 360-degree feedback evaluation for approximately 12 years. She stated that the advantage of this evaluation is that the employee seems to get more honest feedback. The disadvantage of this evaluation is that in a large organization such as theirs it is cost prohibitive to give to all of there managers or personnel. Coca-Cola Enterprises only use this evaluation for employees that they see potential in. In their organization it is used to help develop their personnel into better managers and supervisors. Components that make quality evaluations include questions that are asked in several different ways to insure accurate responses. The evaluations should be anonymous to encourage honest ratings. Representative Anderson stated that the evaluation is not used for pay increases and is only a small factor in promotions. She stated that the evaluation is a part of a performance development system that also includes a performance appraisal, a development needs assessment, and succession planning. When the evaluation system was implemented, it was only used on a small group of personnel and it is still only used for mid and upper management. She stated that the evaluation is customized for their company and an outside company tabulates the results (M. Anderson, personal communication, January 19, 2005).

The results of the interview with Human Resource Specialist Laura Skinner of Continental Airlines revealed that they have been using the 360-degree feedback evaluation process for at least six years. She stated that the advantage of using this type of evaluation was that it provided broader feedback about the employee's performance. She stated that the disadvantage of this system is that if you catch a rater on a bad day they might not provide the most accurate input. She stated that all of the managers in the company are rated annually and that the evaluation is used to make them aware of their performance and in which area they need

improvement. Specialist Skinner stated that the evaluations were not tied into pay increases or promotions. She believed that when the evaluation was implemented it was done company wide and that it is customized to meet Continental Airline's needs. She stated that all of the information is tabulated by an outside agency (L. Skinner, personal communication, January 21, 2005).

The results of each step of this applied research project, the literature review and the interviews, provided information to answer the research questions. It further provided information to achieve the purpose of this applied research project of evaluating the concept of the 360-degree feedback evaluation and to make a recommendation to the fire chief as to whether this should be implemented as an annual performance evaluation for the DFD. It also resulted in the conclusion that recommends that the DFD not use this type of process for the annual performance evaluation. However, it is further recommended to purchase the software for the 360-degree feedback evaluation process and implement it as a personnel development and training tool within the department.

The process by which the data in this applied research project was analyzed was to review all the information obtained in the literature collected and through the telephone interviews. The data was then compared to the researcher's knowledge of the DFD. The data that was feasible to use within DFD and relevant to the problem and purpose of this applied research project was used to answer the research questions and to develop a recommendation for the fire chief of the DFD about the use of the 360-degree feedback evaluation as a annual performance evaluation within the department.

The result of this applied research project was a memo to the fire chief with a recommendation as to whether the 360-degree feedback evaluation would be effective as an

annual performance evaluation within the DFD. This memo included two recommendations that resulted from this project. The first was that the DFD not use the 360-degree feedback evaluation as an annual performance evaluation and the second was that the DFD should purchase the software for this type of evaluation process and implement it as a personnel training and development tool. This memo is provided in appendix B.

Discussion

Over the past decade the fire service has started to recognize that there are many similarities between itself and the corporate world. In both worlds there is a budget to be administered, personnel to be managed, and a product or service to be delivered. In the corporate realm, corporations spend millions of dollars on consultants and studies on how to be more productive, as the more productive a company is the more money it has the potential to earn. The fire service is often handicapped in this area due to budget restraints and staffing restrictions. Over the years, fire departments have often borrowed ideas from other departments due to these restrictions. Departments have often found that it is more productive to borrow ideas from each other than to try to reinvent ways of doing things. With this being the case, this researcher feels that the fire service should look not just at each other, but also more at the corporate world for ideas pertaining to administrative issues.

There are several comparisons between the results of this research project and the findings of the authors in the literature reviewed. Bohlander, Snell, and Sherman (2001) in the text book *Managing Human Resources 12th Edition* indicate that over 90 percent of fortune 1000 companies were using some form of the 360-degree feedback evaluation. This is consistent with the results of the interviews conducted in that each of the fortune 500 companies interviewed used this type of evaluation process. There seems to be many advantages to this type of

evaluation process. Heathfield (n.d.a) in her article *360-Degree Feedback: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* advises that the 360-degree feedback evaluation allows employees to understand how their performance is viewed by supervisors, peers, subordinates, and their external customers. This is consistent with the results of the interview with Battalion Chief Strayhan who advised that an advantage of this evaluation is that you get feedback from personnel you directly work with. Kirksey et al. (1994) in their article *Companies Evaluate Employees From All Perspectives* states that this evaluation provides a more comprehensive view of employee performance and helps increase the credibility of the performance appraisal system. This is consistent with the interview with Captain Botto who advised that when feedback that comes from multiple personnel and not just from the supervisor, people tend to believe it more and take a closer look at themselves. There are also some disadvantages to this type of evaluation process. DeBare (1997) in her article *360-Degrees of Evaluation More Companies Turning to Full-Circle Job Reviews* indicate that if the evaluation process is implemented poorly or the evaluations themselves are completed without care, the process can create widespread resentment and confusion. This was the case with Captain Botto who advised that the multi-rater evaluation process failed in his department due to poor implementation and the tabulation of the feedback being performed incorrectly. Koebelin (1999) writes in the article *Are You Ready for 360* that this type of evaluation process will enhance team efficiency by recognizing gaps in team skills in addition to creating data for companies to analyze to create individual training and development. This is confirmed by Representative Leann Connell who advised that the evaluation is used at Cisco Systems to help the employee gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses, and to help their team grow in a positive manner. There are many components that make a quality 360-degree feedback evaluation. Kirksey et al. in their article *Companies*

Evaluate Employees From All Perspectives writes anonymous raters are chosen by most organizations. Heathfield (n.d.b) in her article *The Great Debates About 360-Degree Feedback* writes the evaluation should not be used to determine pay increases and promotions. This is consistent with all of the interviews as each organization used anonymous raters and none used the evaluation to determine pay increases or promotions. Corporations have been using the 360-degree feedback evaluation process for over a decade now with positive success in personnel development. This researcher feels that the fire service should start using this process as well. Personnel are the most valuable resource the fire department has yet a very small percentage of budgets are devoted to developing this resource. This researcher feels that this is a good tool for personnel development.

This researcher's interpretation of the results of this study is that information was obtained to develop a recommendation to the DFD Fire Chief as to whether the 360-degree feedback evaluation should be implemented as the annual performance evaluation. The results of this applied research project were essential in developing this recommendation. It is also this researcher's interpretation from the results of this research that there is a use for the 360-degree feedback evaluation within the DFD, but not as an annual performance evaluation. It should however be incorporated into the department as a personnel development and training tool.

The implication of this research to the DFD organization is clear. By conducting this research the DFD will not waste time and effort implementing this type of evaluation process as an annual performance evaluation. However, the results of this research clearly indicate that if implemented correctly as a personnel development tool, personnel will have a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. This will result in positive growth with personnel in the department.

Recommendations

The problem is that the DFD does not have an effective annual performance evaluation for the personnel in the department. To achieve the purpose of evaluating the concept of 360-degree feedback evaluation and to make a recommendation to the fire chief as to whether it should be implemented into the Deltona Fire Department's annual employee performance evaluation process, data was collected and a recommendation was formed. The data that was collected supports two recommendations. The first recommendation is that the DFD not use the 360-degree feedback evaluation as an annual employee performance evaluation. The research recommends that if this evaluation process is used that it not be used for pay or promotion purposes. Since annual performance evaluations dictate pay raises for administrative personnel and can be a factor in the promotion of operational personnel in the DFD, this type of evaluation process would not be effective. The second recommendation is that the department purchases the software for this type of evaluation process and implements it as an employee training and development tool. Implementing the 360-degree feedback evaluation as a training and development tool will improve the organization through positive development of its personnel year after year.

These recommendations are provided for the DFD. They are also provided for any future readers of this applied research project who wish to evaluate the concept of the 360-degree feedback evaluation for their organization.

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Appendix A

Evaluating the 360-Degree Feedback Evaluation for the Deltona Fire Department

Interview Questions

1. How long has your organization used the 360-degree feedback evaluation?
2. What have been the advantages of using the 360-degree feedback evaluation in your organization?
3. What have been the disadvantages of using the 360-degree feedback evaluation in your organization?
4. What is the 360-degree feedback evaluation used to accomplish in your organization?
5. What conditions or components do you feel make a quality 360-degree feedback evaluation?
6. Is the 360-degree feedback evaluation used to determine pay increases?
7. Is the 360-degree feedback evaluation used to help determine promotions in your organization?
8. When the 360-degree feedback evaluation was implemented into the organization, was it implemented company wide or with a smaller group first?
9. Is the evaluation instrument customized for your organization or an off-the-shelf evaluation?
10. Does your company's human resource department tabulate and evaluate the results or does an outside company do it?

Appendix B

Memo To DFD Fire Chief

To: Chief Ennist

From: Division Chief Snyder

Date: January 19, 2005

Reference: 360-Degree Feedback Evaluation

I have evaluated the concept of the 360-degree feedback evaluation at your request as a research project for the National Fire Academy. During this research I reviewed literature from numerous trade magazines both fire service and human resource related, as well as college textbooks, public library databases, and internet articles. I also conducted interviews with fire service leaders and human resources specialists from around the country that have experience using this type of evaluation system.

As a result of this research I recommend that we do not use the 360-degree feedback evaluation as an annual employee performance evaluation. During my research I have found that none of the personnel I interviewed, nor any of the literature I reviewed recommend using this as an annual personnel performance evaluation. The research recommends that if this evaluation process is used that it not be used for pay or promotion purposes. Personnel that rate employees when pay increases or promotions are involved tend to rate personnel higher than deserved. Since annual performance evaluations dictate pay raises for administrative personnel and can be a factor in the promotion of operational personnel, this type of evaluation process would not be effective.

However, I do recommend that we look into available software for 360-degree feedback evaluations for the purpose of employee development and training. My research indicates that the feedback developed by this evaluation process is extremely valuable in educating employees on their strengths and weaknesses and in demonstrating areas needed for positive development. This evaluation process would require a commitment on the behalf of the department as it is more time intensive and administratively complex than the traditional evaluation system. An evaluation team would need to be formed to administer the process, as the implementation process is critical to the evaluation's success. If this evaluation process is implemented poorly or not administered correctly after implementation, it can be more destructive than constructive. However, if implemented and administered correctly it is a very valuable tool for personnel development.

I have attached my research project for your review. Please let me know when we can meet to further discuss this evaluation process.